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The situation in Burundi

Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to resolution 2303 (2016), in which the Security Council requested me to report to it on the situation in Burundi every three months, including on any public incidents of incitement to hatred and violence. Since my previous report of 25 January 2018 (S/2018/89), my Special Envoy for Burundi has conducted several visits to Burundi and the region, held consultations with the African Union Commission for the Great Lakes Region, and provided briefings to the Security Council on 10 and 24 May and 9 August 2018. My Special Envoy also met with President of Uganda, Yoweri Kaguta Museveni, and former President of Tanzania, Benjamin Mkapa, the mediator and the facilitator, respectively, of the East African Community-led dialogue process.

2. The present report covers political developments in Burundi since August 2018, including regional initiatives and my Special Envoy's efforts to help to revive the inter-Burundian dialogue process, and contains information on activities conducted by the entities of the United Nations system in Burundi.

II. Major developments

A. Political developments

3. The signing by the ruling party and various political parties allied to it of a road map for the general elections to be held in 2020 and the appointment of new members of the national independent electoral commission, la Commission électorale nationale indépendente, are two notable political developments that have taken place in Burundi during the period under review, both of which have been contested by the opposition coalition. In addition, the convening of the fifth session of the inter-Burundian dialogue in October was the main highlight of the reporting period.

4. The facilitator of the East African Community-led inter-Burundian dialogue held consultations from 20 to 22 October with civil society organizations, including women, young people and members of the media and religious groups. From 25 to 29 October, the facilitator held the fifth session of the dialogue process. The Government, the ruling party, its political allies and civil society organizations affiliated with it did not participate in either the dialogue or the consultations.

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Developments within Burundi

5. On 7 June, the new constitution was promulgated by President of Burundi Pierre Nkurunziza, who also declared at the time that he would not stand for re-election in 2020. Subsequently, on 3 August, members of the Ministry of the Interior, Civic Education and Local Development invited registered political parties to attend a meeting in Kayanza province to discuss issues relating to the 2020 elections and to seek agreement on themes such as peace consolidation, democracy, political tolerance, inclusiveness and the promotion of human rights. Twenty-two of Burundi's 32 registered political parties attended the meeting, which also featured a discussion on the electoral code and legislation pertaining to political parties. At its conclusion, 20 of the 22 participants adopted a road map for the 2020 elections, including leaders of the Union pour le progrès national (UPRONA) and other parties considered to be affiliated with the ruling Conseil national pour la défense de la démocratie-Forces pour la défense de la démocratie (CNDD-FDD). The outcome document, known as the 2018 Kayanza road map, has not been made public, however, participants at the meeting shared that, in the road map, those who adopted it: (a) commended government efforts to re-establish peace in Burundi; (b) urged investment in the country; (c) called for free elections, freedom of political space and freedom of expression; (d) called for political pluralism; (e) recognised that no political actor, except those who were allegedly involved in the coup attempt of May 2015, was subject to judicial proceedings; (f) encouraged the return of political actors and of refugees; and (g) guaranteed the independence of the national independent electoral commission. Signatories of the document noted that it would ensure the return of exiled politicians who were not under prosecution by the Burundian judiciary and allow for the registration of the returnees whose names were missing from the electoral registers compiled prior to the constitutional referendum of May 2018. On 25 September, during a radio talk show to discuss the Kayanza road map, the Assistant Minister of the Interior stated that, with the new constitution in place, the inter-Burundian dialogue was obsolete and that any further dialogue should be held in Bujumbura.

6. Representatives of both the Sahwanya-Front pour la démocratie du Burundi (Sahwanya-FRODEBU) party and the Rassemblement national pour le changement (RANAC) party attended the Kayanza meeting but declined to sign the document. A Sahwanya-FRODEBU spokesperson stated that the meeting had no consensus and that the road map had been prepared in advance by unknown actors. Separately, a RANAC representative declared that the party would challenge CNDD-FDD in the 2020 elections. The opposition coalition Amizero y'Abarundi, led by Agathon Rwasa, was invited to the Kayanza session but did not attend. Its members criticised the process as lacking inclusivity, noting that many political actors had been excluded.

7. The opposition coalition in diaspora, or the external opposition, Conseil national pour le respect de l'Accord d'Arusha pour la paix et la réconciliation au Burundi et la restauration de l'état de droit (CNARED), held an extraordinary session on 4 and 5 August 2018, in response to the promulgation of the new constitution, which it indicated had effectively destroyed the Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement. In a further statement, on 28 August 2018, CNARED called for the East African Community-led dialogue to urgently organise a "real round of negotiations, as inclusive as possible, in order to put an end to the Burundian political crisis". On 14 September, the CNARED Chairperson addressed a letter to the facilitator in which he listed issues and requirements that could facilitate the success of the upcoming dialogue session, including: (a) compliance with the principle of inclusivity through the participation of all parties and members of CNARED, including those who have arrest warrants filed against them; (b) high-level representation of the Government of Burundi; (c) presence of the mediator in the talks; (d) improved conditions for

refugees in Tanzania; and (e) the continued engagement of the African Union and the United Nations as partners with the East African Community in its facilitation.

8. On 20 August, while celebrating the anniversary of his re-election in 2015, Mr. Nkurunziza expressed his appreciation to those Burundians who had voted for him in 2015 and welcomed "the peaceful, secure and calm climate across the country", noting the "total freedom" of the population. He reiterated his commitment to reconciling Burundians and to promoting the values of love, complementarity, discipline and mutual respect. The President also warned against any attempt to overthrow elected institutions, threatening those who should dare of "falling into their own trap".

9. On 18 September, the President presided over the swearing-in ceremony of the new members of the national independent electoral commission, whose selection had been confirmed by Parliament on 29 August. The newly elected members swore allegiance to the national unity charter, the Constitution and the law and pledged to organise independent, impartial, free and fair elections with a "strong sense of patriotism". Members of the Amizero y'Abarundi coalition denounced the new configuration as lacking inclusivity and objected to the fact that they had not been consulted.

10. According to the new constitution, independent members of coalitions are not permitted to stand for election. As a result, prominent opposition figure Mr. Rwasa announced the creation of his political party, Le Front national pour la liberté (FNL) Amizero y'Abarundi, on 12 September 2018. The development was understood to reflect his intention to run in the 2020 presidential race. In announcing the new party, he appealed to other members of the Amizero y'Abarundi coalition, in particular those from the non-recognized wing of UPRONA, to join it. Consequently, the leader of the registered Forces nationales de libération (FNL) party, Jacques Bigirimana, filed a complaint with the Ministry of the Interior against Mr. Rwasa for plagiarizing the acronym FNL.

11. On 18 October, the president of the Sahwanya-Frodebu opposition political party announced the party's withdrawal from the CNARED opposition platform. The decision was reportedly taken in order to attract to the party more supporters who wished to see the democratic ideals of late President Melchior Ndadaye realized. Sahwanya-Frodebu also called upon all political actors involved in the inter-Burundian dialogue to work together to resolve the crisis in Burundi.

Inter-Burundian dialogue

12. At the nineteenth ordinary summit of the East African Community, held in in Kampala on 23 February 2018, the facilitator of the inter-Burundian dialogue was asked to "expeditiously conclude" the dialogue process; he subsequently made plans to hold a fifth session of the dialogue in April 2018. The effort was hampered, however, by the Government's announcement that it would not participate in any dialogue-related activity until after the constitutional referendum. After the promulgation of the Constitution, the facilitator dispatched his team to consult with the Government, political parties, the external opposition coalition, civil society organizations, young people, women, religious groups and the media on the holding of the fifth session and its agenda.

13. A delegation of the joint technical working group, comprising the East African Community facilitation team and representatives of the African Union and the United Nations, met in Bujumbura from 16 to 18 August to begin preparations for the fifth session of the dialogue. During the visit to Bujumbura, the working group met with members of CNDD-FDD and its political allies, who stressed that the country was stable and that several items on the facilitator's agenda had been resolved, notably

the amendment of the Constitution and the issue of presidential term limits. They nevertheless agreed to participate in the fifth session, on the condition that it would be the last. CNDD-FDD noted that the 2018 Kayanza road map should be the basis for the dialogue and called for the process to be moved to Burundi.

14. While in Burundi, the joint technical working group also met with representatives of the Amizero y'Abarundi opposition coalition and other opposition political parties. It was their view that there were several unresolved items on the proposed agenda to be discussed during the dialogue, including the reconfiguration of the national independent electoral commission and the emergence of a consensual road map with a hybrid mechanism that could closely monitor its implementation. They also concurred that the fifth session should be the final one.

15. From 6 to 8 September 2018, the joint technical working group visited Brussels for consultations with the external opposition coalition. CNARED members expressed a willingness to participate in the fifth session. They reiterated, however, that they be invited as a bloc rather than as individuals, including those who have arrest warrants filed against them. They also expressed their apprehension with regard to the Government's position that the fifth session should be the last.

16. Following the consultations in Bujumbura and Brussels, the joint technical working group concluded that there was sufficient convergence of perspectives to convene a meaningful session and began preparations to hold a meeting in Arusha. The facilitation team also recommended to the facilitator that he convene a meeting of representatives of civil society organizations, including women's, youth and religious groups and the media, ahead of the plenary session.

17. On the basis of the findings of the consultations, the facilitator scheduled the fifth session of the dialogue to take place from 19 to 24 October. However, the Government of Burundi requested that it be postponed until after 24 October to allow for the commemoration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the assassination of the former President, Mr. Ndadaye, organized for 21 October. The facilitator therefore rescheduled the session to take place from 24 to 29 October.

18. On 20 October, the facilitation opened consultations with representatives of women's, youth and religious groups and the media. The meeting was attended by 13 representatives from Bujumbura and outside Burundi. Civil society organizations allied to the Government boycotted the meeting, however, despite having received airplane tickets issued by the United Nations, noting that the facilitator had failed to respond positively to the Government's preconditions. Upon completion of the consultations, on 22 October, participants submitted information on the outcome of their discussions, with a list of recommendations and a road map for the 2020 elections.

19. On 19 October, the Government again requested that the dialogue be postponed, this time until November, arguing that the month of October was a mourning period. In a communiqué dated 23 October, the Government indicated that it would not participate in the fifth session, citing the same reason. Government officials also objected to the fact that certain preconditions had not been met, namely, that the fifth session should focus solely on the 2018 Kayanza road map and that the list of participants be shared ahead of the session. Following consultations with the mediator and subregional leaders, the facilitator postponed the session by one day in order to provide an additional opportunity for the Government, the ruling party and its allies to attend.

20. On 25 October, the facilitator opened the fifth session of the inter-Burundian dialogue, in the absence of the Government, the ruling party and its allied parties. The session was attended by 41 representatives of political parties and political actors

from within and outside Burundi, including two former Heads of State and six key women political and civil society actors. In his opening statement, the facilitator encouraged participants to provide a consensus document, taking into account the 2018 Kayanza road map that was developed by the Government, CNDD-FDD and allied parties, the 2018 Entebbe road map drafted by the internal and external opposition coalition during a joint meeting held from 21 to 23 September, and the recommendations made by the representatives of civil society, women's and youth organizations and the media and religious groups as a result of their meeting in Arusha.

21. The fifth session was concluded by the facilitator on 29 October. In his closing remarks, he emphasized that it was time to reassess his role and the facilitation process as a whole. He thanked the facilitation team and the joint technical working group for their excellent and serious work and for the support they had provided to him throughout his tenure. He announced that he would develop a joint road map, comprising the participants' consensus road map and other previously drafted road maps. The facilitator's road map would include the principles and minimum standards that he considered to be matters of consensus, in an effort to ensure the holding of credible elections in 2020. He plans to present the document, as well as his final report on the dialogue process, to the mediator and other Heads of State of the East African Community, at the upcoming ordinary summit to be held on 30 November 2018, so that they may consider the way forward.

B. Security situation

22. During the period under review, the overall security situation remained generally calm, amid the discovery by police of weapons and ammunition, as well as reported cases of murder, arbitrary arrests and disappearances. A number of attacks on villages and military positions by unidentified armed men were also reported.

23. Human rights organizations continued to receive allegations of human rights violations and abuses, including killings, forced disappearances, ill-treatment, cases of arbitrary arrest and detention and threats and restrictions on freedom of association, expression and movement. The victims of most human rights violations are reportedly predominantly members of opposition political parties, in particular FNL-Rwasa members or members of opposition coalitions perceived as opponents to the regime who voted against the amendment of the Constitution in the referendum held in May 2018. The national intelligence service, the police and the Imbonerakure are accused by those organizations of being the perpetrators.

24. Several attacks by armed individuals were also reported. On 4 September 2018, two unidentified armed individuals attacked Nkurubuye colline, in Gisuru commune, Ruyigi province, along the Tanzania-Burundi border. The attackers reportedly fled towards Tanzania. No casualties were reported. At night on 15 September 2018, a military post in Bujumbura province on the border between Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo came under attack by an unidentified armed group, which had reportedly crossed into Burundi. Police reported that one assailant was killed, one policeman was wounded, five vehicles were set ablaze and many properties were destroyed. The Attorney-General of Burundi attributed the attack to a group of bandits who intended to rob a bank. The murder of a local Imbonerakure leader and his wife, on 19 September 2018 in Buyumpu zone, Kayanza province, near the border with Rwanda, was attributed to members of an armed group that came from Rwanda by the Ministry of Public Security; the group subsequently crossed back into Rwanda. No intervention by the security forces was reported on the border. Rwanda did not respond to the accusation.

25. In Mukike commune, Bujumbura Rural province, four people were killed and two others wounded on 3 August 2018 in clashes between national army soldiers and unidentified armed men. Three of the alleged assailants were detained for investigation. Clashes between members of the Imbonerakure and an army soldier from the Mudubugu military camp were reported on 4 August in Bubanza province, and they resulted in the death of one person and injuries to three others. A Burundian military vehicle was reportedly ambushed during the night of 5 August in the area of Rukoko forest, Bubanza province, along the border with the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The attack resulted in the death of three soldiers and the injury of five others. The spokesperson of the Burundian armed group Forces nationales de libération-Nzabampema claimed responsibility for the attack and warned the Burundian army away from venturing into the Rukoko area.

26. On 20 October in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, South Kivu province, authorities reported clashes between the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC) and a Burundian armed rebel group in Kabunambo village on the Uvira-Bukavu highway. Rebels had reportedly crossed the border along the Ruzizi River and were heading to hills and mountains in the Uvira area. FARDC reportedly killed one Burundian rebel and arrested five others. A village chief indicated that a significant number of Burundian armed rebel groups had been seen moving to Kirema, Bwegera and other villages in Uvira area, South Kivu province. Similar incidents were reported on 23 October, resulting in the killing of four Burundian rebels belonging to the Résistance pour un État de droit au Burundi-Tabara armed group and six others jailed in Uvira town. The incident occurred following armed confrontations between FARDC and the rebels at the Rubarika locality. FARDC confirmed having seized 22 AK-47s, 1 heavy gun and 1 mortar, which were reportedly used by the Burundian rebels.

C. Socioeconomic developments

27. On 22 August 2018 in Gitega commune and province, the Government launched a 10-year national development plan aimed at bolstering the country's economy. The national development plan is anchored in the Sustainable Development Goals, with 36 key targets identified. It is aimed at promoting the development of the rural areas in Burundi by 2027 through: (a) efforts to strengthen democracy, good governance and the rule of law; (b) inclusive growth for economic resilience and sustainable development; and (c) sustainable management of the environment and climate change and land-use planning. The national development plan would require $2.5 billion to be fully implemented. International donors have been advised by the Government of Burundi to use it as a framework for providing assistance covering the various sectors of agriculture and livestock, food security, support to infrastructure, development of the mining sector, environmental management and climate change, health and social protection. The President stressed that the national development plan would lead to economic sustainability in Burundi. The Minister for Foreign Affairs invited members of the international community and organizations to the launch event and requested that they contribute to the financing of the national development plan.

28. On 5 October 2018, the Burundi configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission held a meeting with a focus on socioeconomic development and the national development plan. Its Chair, Jürg Lauber, shared his plans to travel to Burundi from 4 to 7 November in order to convene a socioeconomic retreat and engage with the Government on the national development plan. At the meeting, the resident coordinator provided an update on the situation on the ground. He informed participants that the United Nations country team was in the process of completing a new United Nations development assistance framework, which would be aligned with

the new national development plan. The resident coordinator highlighted some positive recent trends, including improvements in health, education and agriculture. He underlined that access to education had considerably improved. He stressed that cyclical shocks had reversed some development gains and highlighted continued humanitarian needs. He noted that some 56 per cent of children still suffered from malnutrition.

29. The Peacebuilding Fund approved $7.1 million in September 2018 for the promotion of expanding political space and strengthening good governance. The two new Fund projects are aimed at empowering women and young people in political processes, promoting localized conflict resolution and prevention support, alleviating the consequences of displacement and return and strengthening the rule of law and good governance.

D. Humanitarian situation

30. The humanitarian situation remains fragile and is marked by high levels of vulnerability and acute humanitarian needs in some sectors. Levels of food insecurity and malnutrition have improved, compared with 2017, due to two consecutive relatively good agricultural seasons. Some 1.7 million people are still food insecure, a 35 per cent decrease compared with 2017. A slight reduction has been reported in internal displacement of the population, with the number of internally displaced persons estimated at 159,000 in August 2018, most of whom are displaced owing to natural disasters, according to estimates of the International Organization for Migration. However, an increase in displacement is expected, owing to the start of the rainy season, which began in September.

31. On 27 September, the National Security Council of Burundi decided to suspend all activities of international non-governmental organizations working in the country for three months, pending compliance with the regulations guiding international non-governmental organizations issued on 23 January 2017. The regulations require that international non-governmental organizations provide the Ministry of Finance with access to their finances, maintain a third of their budget in the State bank and adhere to ethnic quotas in the recruitment of staff (60 per cent Hutu, 40 per cent Tutsi, 30 per cent women). As a result of the suspension, the voluntary repatriation programme was put on hold, mainly because key activities, such as transport and logistics, transit centre management, protection and health, had until that time been carried out by two international non-governmental organizations. The suspension has had a critical impact on programmes for the 70,000 Congolese refugees in four camps in Burundi. Refugees in camps and those in urban areas have also been affected by the Government's decision, and the services provided by those international non-governmental organizations have been reduced to only essential activities.

32. On 17 October, Canada, Japan, Switzerland, the United States of America, the European Union and the United Nations issued a joint statement in which they stressed the importance of the work of international non-governmental organizations in Burundi in, inter alia, fighting malaria, HIV/AIDS and malnutrition, supporting the voluntary return of refugees and engaging in the agriculture, energy and entrepreneurship sectors. They offered to support the negotiation efforts between the non-governmental organizations and the Government.

33. As at 9 November, about 25 international non-governmental organizations have received authorization from the Minister of the Interior to resume their activities, after having presented the required documents. Another 40 have also submitted their documents and should resume operations shortly. The Ministry of Agriculture has set

up a commission to observe the recruitment of the staff of international non-governmental organizations and their procurement practices.

34. During the period under review, almost 1,000 refugees per week returned from Tanzania to Burundi under the Burundi-Tanzania-Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) tripartite agreement. As at 27 September 2018, 52,160 refugees had been repatriated to Burundi, mainly from Tanzania, but also from Kenya. The number of Burundian refugees in neighbouring countries stood at 383,283, of whom 227,510 were in Tanzania. The United Nations Development Programme, UNHCR and other United Nations entities are working on socioeconomic reintegration activities for returnees. However, it is estimated that an additional 1,000 refugees leave Burundi per month. Continued advocacy for the full respect of international standards guiding the right of asylum and voluntary nature of returns is essential.

35. The level of humanitarian financing for Burundi remains low. The 2018 humanitarian response plan, the implementation of which requires some $142 million, was 52 per cent funded as at 9 November.

E. Human rights and judicial cooperation

Human rights violations and abuses

36. The human rights situation in Burundi remains a concern. During the reporting period, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) continued to receive allegations of human rights violations and abuses, including killings, forced disappearances, ill-treatment, cases of arbitrary arrest and detention and threats and restrictions on freedom of association, expression and movement. At least 45 unidentified dead bodies were found throughout the country, some bearing signs of having been subjected to violence. Persistent violations and abuses of human rights contributed to a climate of intimidation in the country. In most cases, targets of such violations were members of opposition political parties or coalitions, those suspected of opposing the Government or those who voted or were perceived to have voted against the amendment of the Constitution in the 17 May referendum. Members of the national intelligence service, the police, the army and the Imbonerakure were reportedly the primary perpetrators.

37. The limited democratic space remains a critical concern in the context of the constitutional referendum and as the debate for the elections to be held in 2020 begins. Civil liberties, such as freedom of expression, association and movement continued to be restricted, including the suspension of the activities of some local news networks and human rights organizations. Individuals belonging to opposition political parties, when seen together, are often accused of holding illegal meetings, arrested, detained and later released. However, some of them are detained beyond the 14-day legal time limit, with reports of physical abuse. On 13 August 2018 in Gitega, human rights defender and former head of Association burundaise pour la protection des droits humains et des personnes détenues Nestor Nibitanga was accused of undermining the internal security of the State and of rebellion and was subsequently sentenced to five years' imprisonment. He is the fifth human rights defender to be sentenced since March 2018, following Germain Rukuki (32 years' imprisonment) and three members of the local non-governmental organization Parole et action pour le réveil des consciences et l'évolution des mentalités (10 years' imprisonment each).

38. The ongoing political impasse has had a negative impact on the ensuring of economic, social and cultural rights, which has seen little improvement. An increase in unemployment and a rise in the prices of basic commodities and services have negatively affected the population, and children in particular; this has led to an

increase in the school dropout rate and has hindered efforts to address severe malnutrition.

Cooperation with human rights and judicial mechanisms

39. Contrary to the commitment of the Government of Burundi to resume full cooperation with OHCHR, noted with satisfaction by the Human Rights Council in its resolution 36/2, discussions on the new memorandum of understanding between OHCHR and the Government have remained stalled. The Government has not responded to the most recent note verbale, of 8 May.

40. In its report (A/HRC/39/63), the Human Rights Council-mandated Commission of Inquiry on Burundi indicated that serious human rights violations, including crimes against humanity, had persisted in Burundi in 2017 and 2018. Documented violations included cases of summary execution, enforced disappearance, cases of arbitrary arrest and detention, torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, sexual violence and violations of civil liberties, such as freedom of expression, association, assembly and movement (ibid., paras. 10 and 77). Opposition and suspected opposition members were cited as the primary targets, especially those who refused to join the ruling CNDD-FDD party, refused to register to vote in the constitutional referendum or refused to pay contributions. The key perpetrators were identified as members of the Imbonerakure, the police and the national intelligence service. The Government has once again refused any cooperation with the Commission of Inquiry, despite the repeated requests and initiatives of the Commission.

41. Various government officials, leaders of political parties, and civil society representatives deemed to be close to the ruling CNDD-FDD party, as well as the Independent National Human Rights Commission, denounced the report of the Commission of Inquiry. The Minister of Human Rights, Social Affairs and Gender of Burundi accused the Commission of being at the centre of "an international conspiracy against the Government". On 11 September, both the National Assembly and the Senate rejected the report, following briefings by the Ministers of Justice, the Interior and Human Rights. The Speaker of the Senate accused the Commission of collecting false information on social media and figures provided by insurgents and by "putschists based in Rwanda". The Speaker of the National Assembly said that the report had been "drafted solely based on what the commissioners wanted" and had failed to mention the Government's achievements regarding justice, human rights and security.

42. On 12 September, the Government declared the three members of the Commission of Inquiry personae non gratae. The Government and allied civil society organizations organized peaceful demonstrations on 15 and 22 September, respectively, in Bujumbura and in several other regions of the country to protest against the report. When the Commission of Inquiry presented its report to the Third Committee of the General Assembly on 24 October, a representative of the delegation of Burundi delivered a statement rejecting the report of the Commission and claiming that the Commissioners were "remotely controlled by external forces". The representative of Burundi threatened the members of the Commission, stating that his country "reserved the legitimate right to bring to justice the authors [of the report] for defamation and destabilization attempt against Burundi" as "criminal responsibility was [considered] individual". Allegations that the President had used hate speech was also "a defamation that would not go unpunished". In response, the High Commissioner for Human Rights issued a statement on 25 October, deeply regretting Burundi's belligerent and defamatory response to the findings of the Commission of Inquiry and its members for the work they had done at the express request of the Human Rights Council, of which Burundi is a member.

43. Mr. Rwasa, leader of the Amizero y'Abarundi opposition coalition and Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly, called upon the Ministry of Justice to prosecute all perpetrators of human rights violations "in order to avoid providing the United Nations with pretexts to make such accusations". Members of his parliamentary group and other opposition members meanwhile welcomed the report as "truthful and necessary". On 8 August 2018, 36 Burundian and international non-governmental organizations addressed a petition to the Human Rights Council calling for the renewal of the mandate of the Commission of Inquiry, deeming it "critically important" to improving the human rights situation in the country. By its resolution 39/14 of 28 September 2018, the Human Rights Council extended the mandate of the Commission of Inquiry on Burundi for an additional year and urged the Government to cooperate fully with the Commission.

44. The suspension of the activities of international non-governmental organizations operating in Burundi, on 27 September, has been interpreted as an effort to exert greater control over them and their work at the community level, in particular in the lead up to the 2020 elections.

III. Activities of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Burundi and his Office

45. My Special Envoy travelled to Burundi from 3 to 11 September to continue his engagement with national stakeholders, including on the inter-Burundian dialogue. In the margins of the seventy-third session of the General Assembly, my Special Envoy also interacted with stakeholders and partners concerned with the inter-Burundian dialogue and the situation in Burundi. He travelled again for further consultations from 2 to 11 November.

46. In Bujumbura, during his earlier visit in September, my Special Envoy met with government officials, including the Minister for Foreign Affairs, representatives of political parties, including the opposition, the Special Representative of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission for the Great Lakes Region, women's groups, religious leaders, former Heads of State, members of the diplomatic corps and other members of the international community. The objectives of the visit were to assess developments on the ground and to discuss the participation of all stakeholders in the fifth session of the dialogue. With the Minister for Foreign Affairs, my Special Envoy discussed the dialogue process, relations between the United Nations and Burundi and the finalization of the status-of-mission agreement between the Government and his Office in Bujumbura.

47. On 12 September in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, my Special Envoy briefed the facilitator of the dialogue on the outcome of his meetings in Burundi with various stakeholders, and further discussed the inter-Burundian dialogue process. At the meeting, they exchanged views on the need to ensure that the appropriate preparations are made before convening the fifth dialogue session, bearing in mind the substantive divergences listed in the conclusions of the fourth dialogue session.

48. My Special Envoy held consultations with various stakeholders on the status of the inter-Burundian dialogue, as well as prospects for holding its fifth session, in the margins of the seventy-third session of the General Assembly in New York from 25 to 28 September. He met with the Prime Minister of Uganda, Ruhakana Rugunda, who confirmed the commitment of the President of Uganda to assist in the advancement of the East African Community-led inter-Burundian dialogue. The Minister for Foreign Affairs of Burundi, Ezéchiel Nibigira, affirmed to my Special Envoy his Government's commitment to participate fully in the fifth session of the dialogue. My Special Envoy also consulted with a number of European permanent representatives

and special envoys. In a meeting held in the margins of the seventy-third session of the General Assembly, members of the international contact group on Burundi recommitted themselves to support the fifth dialogue session.

IV. Observations and recommendations

49. The decision by the Government of Burundi, the ruling party, and allied parties to not attend the fifth session of the inter-Burundian dialogue has been received with concern by various stakeholders and external partners. At meetings held in the margins of the seventy-third session of the General Assembly in September, the Minister for Foreign Affairs shared his Government's concerns on the process but also reiterated his Gc .ernment's commitment to participate in the upcoming session of the inter-Burundian dialogue. While I took note of the Government's conditions for attending the process, it is ultimately the responsibility of the authorities to create a conducive environment in which the country can fulfil its potential and the people of Burundi enjoy their rights and freedoms, including participation in credible and inclusive elections. I believe that the East African Community-led inter-Burundian dialogue can help to achieve that objective.

50. The political situation in Burundi continues to require the focused attention of the international community in general, and that of the Security Council in particular, as mistrust continues to run deep between the Government and the ruling party on the one hand, and the opposition on the other. The lack of significant progress on the inter-Burundian dialogue towards a lasting resolution of the 2015 crisis remains a matter of serious concern, especially as Burundi prepares for the elections to be held in 2020. Furthermore, grave concerns continue to be expressed with regard to violations and abuses of human rights across the country.

51. I believe that President Nkurunziza's declaration in June that he would not seek another term in office could contribute to easing political tension and has the potential to bring the parties together to reach consensus while the preparation for the 2020 general elections is under way.

52. I commend the East African Community mediator, Mr. Museveni, and the facilitator, Mr. Mkapa, the African Union and my Special Envoy for their tireless efforts to resume the inter-Burundian dialogue and encourage the concerned parties to meet their obligations in putting an end to the political crisis in the country. I appeal to the East African Community and to all the leaders of the region to redouble their efforts in order to ensure that stability is restored in Burundi, while preserving the gains of the historic Arusha Agreement for Burundi.

53. While the focus of the political dialogue is shifting towards the preparation of the upcoming 2020 elections, all parties should be aware that lasting peace can only be achieved and sustained if a spirit of compromise and the principles of the rule of law are applied in the overall governance of the State. Therefore, in order to create an environment conducive to a resolution to the crisis and to the holding of elections, the country needs to engage in strengthening the capacity of its security institutions to make them more accountable and of service to the people.

54. I take note of the African Union Peace and Security Council discussion on Burundi, held on 19 September, at which it adopted a number of decisions. The Peace and Security Council reaffirmed its commitment to the spirit and letter of the Arusha Agreement, and its support to the efforts of the East African Community-led inter-Burundian dialogue. It also decided to reduce the number of African Union human rights observers and military experts in Burundi, while extending their mandate. I call upon the African Union to maintain its engagement in supporting

Burundi and the East African Community as the country moves forward towards the holding of the elections in 2020. The efforts of the East African Community can only be made stronger with the endorsement and the support of the African Union and the United Nations. The United Nations, in particular through my Special Envoy, will continue its efforts in this regard.

55. I also take note that the security situation across the country continues to improve, despite reported incidents, acts of violence and alleged incursions of armed individuals. I urge the Government, however, to open up political space, ensure the full respect and protection of human rights and quell acts of intimidation. Improving the security situation in the country will greatly help to ensure the holding of credible elections in 2020.

56. I am deeply concerned about continuous reports of human rights violations and abuses and related crimes and call upon the Burundian authorities to conduct full, impartial, independent, effective and thorough investigations into serious violations and abuses of human rights so that all perpetrators are held accountable and all victims are allowed access to effective remedies and adequate reparations.

57. I call upon the Government to fully resume, without further delay, cooperation with all United Nations human rights mechanisms. I encourage it to conclude the discussions with OHCHR towards the discharge of its full mandate in Burundi and the signing of the required memorandum of understanding.

58. I urge the Government to give due consideration to the recommendations made by the Commission of Inquiry mandated by the Human Rights Council and to implement them. I strongly encourage the Government to engage in dialogue with the Commission for the sake of the Burundian people and the neighbouring countries affected by the instability in Burundi.

59. I am deeply concerned by the precarious socioeconomic situation in Burundi, which is an outcome of the political crisis. Addressing the economic challenges will require a renewed effort to restore confidence and trust between the Government of Burundi on the one hand and the donor community and development partners on the other. I welcome the launching of the national development plan for Burundi, which has the potential to offer new avenues of engagement. I call upon the Government of Burundi and its development partners to forge closer ties and work together to implement the national development plan.

60. I also urge the Government to work with my Special Envoy to expedite the finalization of the status-of-mission agreement.

61. I call upon all relevant regional and international partners, including members of the Security Council, to engage in a thorough discussion following the summit of the Heads of State of the East African Community, to be held in late November, in order to take stock and agree on the way forward. In the light of the situation in Burundi, I will propose a set of options for the role of the United Nations in Burundi, following close consultations with key international partners, including the East African Community and African Union.

62. I appreciate the determined efforts of my Special Envoy and the entities of the United Nations system in Burundi. The United Nations continues to be a partner to Burundi and will do its utmost to support the country in finding solutions to its political and socioeconomic challenges.